Petition calls for NHS-funded occupational health services

An e-petition has been launched to reinstate occupational health facilities for dental staff

The removal of occupational health facilities means that dental staff are not entitled to vaccinations that would protect them from blood borne viruses should a needlestick injury occur.

Occupational health services now have to be sourced privately, which can prove costly. The petition calls for the NHS to fund this service once again, and at the time of writing, has received 524 signatures.

Creator of the e-petition, Jenny Newbrook, calls the removal of this facility a 'disgrace' and says that it is 'yet another example of the lack of support, funding and resources allocated to NHS dentistry'.

A study published in scientific journal Occupational Medicine found that those who experience needlestick injuries can suffer persistent and substantial psychiatric illness or depression. A sharp contaminated with infected blood can transmit more than 20 diseases including hepatitis B, C and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). This transmission risk causes worry and stress to the estimated 100,000 people who experience a needlestick accident every year.

Professor Ben Green who undertook the research said: “The psychological aspects of needlestick injuries are often overlooked. The chances of physical damage - infection and so on - are what are focused on by society, but these risks are in reality very small. The main health implication of needlestick incidents is probably psychiatric injury caused by fear and worry.”

To sign the e-petition, go to http://petitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/65952.
Australian dental cuts a ‘disaster’

The British Dental Association’s chief executive Peter Ward has said Bill Moyes’ comparison of patients’ dental treatment with shopping in Lidl or Waitrose is a ‘facile oversimplification’.

In a recent article in the Times, GDC Chair Bill Moyes was quoted as saying that he would be pleased if patient pressure produced in dentistry the ‘Lidl to Waitrose’ model with all the small retailers in the middle.

Peter Ward commented: “Good dentistry is actually about relationships, trust and confidence between dentists and their patients. Seeking to oversimplify this by comparing patient care to the price of baked beans and sun-dried tomatoes completely misses the point.

“That this view is apparently held by the chair of the body charged with protecting patients makes frightening reading. Patient care, clinical quality and safety are really important. Waitrose and Lidl don’t know about those things.”

BDA: GDC Chair ‘oversimplifies’ dental treatment

According to ABC News, the Australian government has cut two dental programs and put a $360 million program for the states to shorten adult waiting lists on hold. Newell Johnson, Griffith University Professor of Dental Research, said this was a “disaster” for dental health and that the waiting lists could double or triple, depending on the delay.

More than $200 million for new dental clinics in regional areas and nursing homes has also been scrapped.

However, Federal Health Minister Peter Dutton says the dental budget is actually going up, with the government intending to spend $2.7 billion on dental services over the next four years. Most of this will go to the Child Dental Benefits Schedule, which provides basic dental work for children aged two to 17.

The government expects to save $80 billion from cutbacks to the health and education sectors over the next ten years.

Patients with kidney disease at lower risk of caries

Patients with chronic kidney disease (CKD) can often have several oral and dental concerns, but are not at a higher risk for dental caries, a new study has found.

With the number of patients with CKD seeking dental care increasing, this study set out to compare specific markers of oral health status of patients with CKD of different stages.

A group of patients with CKD and a control group of participants who were completely disease-free took part in the five-month study. Each patient was examined for dental caries, oral hygiene and periodontal status.

The study found that patients with CKD of various stages had significantly fewer decayed teeth than the control group. This supports previous findings that patients with CKD may be at lower risk for dental caries, due to the protective effects of elevated salivary urea on tooth enamel.

The mean gingival index score for patients with CKD was more than double the score of the control group, and gingival and oral hygiene status declined with advancing stages of CKD. The prevalence of periodontal pockets was higher in patients with CKD.

Could lasers mean the end of root canals?

Lasers could regenerate damaged teeth and be used to prevent root canal treatments, researchers from Harvard University say.

The researchers found that lasers were used to cause pain to 28 blinded volunteers without any touch. With the exception of hairless skin on the hands, spatial acuity improves towards the centre of the body whereas the acuity for touch is best at the extremities, the researchers found.

Lead author Dr Flavia Mancini said: “If you try to test pain with a physical object like a needle, you are also stimulating touch. This clouds the results, like taking an eye test wearing sunglasses. Using a specially-calibrated laser, we stimulate only the pain nerves for touch is best at the extremities, whereas the opposite is true for touch.”

Ability to identify pain varies across the body

Our ability to identify pain – “spatial acuity” – varies across the body, with the forehead and fingertips being most sensitive, a new study from University College London has found.

For the study, published in the journal Annals of Neurology, lasers were used to cause pain to 28 blinded volunteers without any touch. With the exception of hairless skin on the hands, spatial acuity improves towards the centre of the body whereas the acuity for touch is best at the extremities, the researchers found.

Senior author Dr Giandomenico Lammerti said: “Touch and pain are mediated by different sensory systems. While tactile acuity has been well studied, pain acuity has been largely ignored, beyond the common textbook assertion that pain has lower acuity than touch.

“We found the opposite; acuity for touch and pain are actually very similar. The main difference is in their gradients across the body. For example, pain acuity across the arm is much higher at the shoulder than at the wrist, whereas the opposite is true for touch.”

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Coffee could be beneficial to dental health

Strong black coffee has the potential to break down bacterial biofilms, new research has found.

The research, published in the journal SIAM’s Letters in Applied Microbiology, shows that an extract of Coffea canephora – a coffee variety mostly grown in Vietnam and Brazil – appears to cause bacteria in tooth-associated biofilms to break down.

Lead researcher, Andréa Antonio, from Rio de Janeiro’s Federal University, said: “Dental plaque is a classic complex biofilm and it’s the main culprit in tooth decay and gum disease.

Papers of WW2 imprisoned dentist to be sold at auction

The papers, photographs and effects of a dentist working in the army during WW2 were sold at auction at Bonhams in Knightsbridge on June 18 for £4,000-6,000.

Captain Julius Morris Green of the Army Dental Corps worked for the British Military Intelligence Section 9 (MI9) while a prisoner-of-war at Colditz and other camps in Germany. The archive auctioned contains 40 autograph coded letters by Green to his parents and a few to his sister.

Julius Morris Green was born in 1912. He studied at the Dental School of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh and joined the Territorial Army in 1939. He was captured with his brigade at St Valery in June 1941 and spent the remainder of the war in a succession of camps; his misbehaviour meaning that he eventually received the honour of being confined to Oflag IV-C, better known as Colditz.

In January 1941 he was taught the code used to communicate with MI9, the War Office department tasked with aiding resistance fighters in enemy occupied territory and gathering intelligence from British prisoners of war.

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**Fizzy drinks contain more fructose than labels reveal**

Fizzy drinks may contain a much higher dose of fructose than consumers are led to believe, a new study carried out by researchers at the University of Southern California has found.

For the study, published in the journal *Nutrition*, researchers analysed the chemical composition of 34 popular beverages. They found that drinks and juices made with high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi and Sprite, all contain 50 per cent more fructose than glucose.

The Corn Refiners Association, a trade group representing HFCS producers, has long argued that HFCS is only negligibly different than natural sugar (sucrose), which is made up of equal parts of fructose and glucose. However this research shows that there are considerably higher levels of fructose in these drinks, challenging the industry’s claim that ‘sugar is sugar’.

Lead author of the study, Michael Goran, said: ‘We found what ends up being consumed in these beverages is neither natural sugar nor HFCS, but instead a fructose-intense concoction that could increase one’s risk for diabetes, cardiovascular disease and liver disease.

“The human body isn’t designed to process this form of sugar at such high levels. Unlike glucose, which serves as fuel for the body, fructose is processed almost entirely in the liver where it is converted to fat.”

The research also shows that the ingredients on some product labels do not represent their fructose content. Pepsi Throwback, for example, indicates it is made with real sugar, yet the analysis showed it contains more than 50 per cent fructose.

**Europe’s oldest dental implant unearthed**

Western Europe’s oldest dental implant has been found by archaeologists in Le Chene, northern France.

The implant, which was an iron pin, was found in the burial chamber of an Iron Age woman, who is said to have been between 20 and 50 years old when she died. The archaeologists say it’s possible that the pin held a false tooth made from wood or bone.

Guillaume Seguin, who excavated the woman’s skeleton, told BBC News: “The skeleton was very badly preserved, but the teeth were in an anatomical position, with the molars, pre-molars, canines and incisors. Then there was this piece of metal. My first reaction was: what is this?”

The teeth were then taken away for analysis, where the team hypothesised that the pin was a dental prosthesis.

**Advergames ‘manipulating’ children’s eating habits**

Children need to be protected from the effects of ‘advergames’, a new report launched by researchers at Bath University says.

Advergames are electronic games that are used to advertise a product, brand or organisation, and are played on social media sites, companies’ own websites or downloadable apps.

Adverts for food and drink products high in salt, sugar and fat are banned around children’s television programmes but advertisers have found a loophole in regulations, meaning they can advertise these products with the electronic games.

Earlier research carried out by the same authors and commissioned by the Famh and Parenting Institute (2012), found that advergames persuade on an emotional, subconscious level and can change children’s behaviour without their conscious awareness. It also found that children as old as 15 do not recognise that advergames are adverts.

One of the leading authors of the report, Dr Haiming Hang, said: "Companies are manipulating children into wanting food and drinks that are high in salt, sugar and fat, against the backdrop of a global obesity crisis. They know that when children are absorbed in playing games their cognitive capacity is fully engaged, and they’re not able to stop and think about the purpose of the game or to engage in any scepticism about the source of the message embedded in it."

The report calls for a clear labelling system for children’s advergames and in-game advertising, a public debate on whether advertising techniques that persuade children subconsciously should be legal, and regulations that apply to advertising on TV to extend to children’s websites. It also calls for a public consultation on whether the Advertising Standards Agency, or an independent council, should oversee marketing to children across all media platforms.

Half of adults in Wales have not seen dentist in two years

Aimost half of adults in Wales have not been to the dentist in the past two years, recent figures from the Welsh government suggest.

The statistics reveal that 54.9 per cent of the population was treated in the 24 months before 31 Dec 2013, despite this, the government says this is an improvement from the same period last year, when 54.7 per cent was treated.

The statistics further show that in the past two years, 64.5 per cent of the child population was treated in Wales, while for adults that figure was 52.4 per cent.

Health spokeswoman for Plaid Cymru, Eluned Parrott, said: “It’s obvious from the number of people who are still unable to find an NHS dentist, even for children, that we need to increase the NHS capacity even further.”

According to the BBC, Lib Dem assembly member, Eluned Parrott, said: “This Welsh Labour government has completely overlooked the dentistry service in Wales. Just stating that everyone should have access to a dentist isn’t enough – there has to be action too.”

**Lack of Bill on professional regulation in Queen’s Speech**

The General Dental Council (GDC) has said it is ‘extremely disappointed’ at the lack of a Bill to reform the legislation governing the health professionals in today’s (6 June 2014) Queen’s Speech, made on 4 June 2014.

The Law Commission has drafted a Bill to reform the health regulation system in the UK but it is now expected that it won’t be introduced to Parliament until after the election.

The GDC said in a statement: “We have been urging Government for the last three years to implement specific changes aimed at improving our ability to protect patients and reduce our costs. One significant change on its own would enable us to save up to £2 million a year – a cost that must be borne by the dental profession. “At present our outdated processes mean that patients have to wait longer for their complaints to be heard, and dental professionals whose fitness to practise has been questioned will not be dealt with as expeditiously as possible. “We are urging the Government to bring forward a Section 60 order to make some key changes to improve our ability to protect the public.”

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